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## BAKALÁŘSKÁ PRÁCE

Who Tells Your Story? A Comparison of *Alexander Hamilton* and *Hamilton*:  
*An American Musical*

Kdo vypráví tvůj příběh? Srovnání *Alexander Hamilton* a *Hamilton*: *An*  
*American Musical*

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The list of people to thank for helping me in my studies and with this work would be too long and incomplete if typed in its entirety; nonetheless, special thanks are in order to Arthur Fry for his indispensable invention.

## **ABSTRAKT**

Tato práce si bere za úkol porovnat události prezentované v prvním dějství muzikálu *Hamilton: An American Musical* s jejich předlohou v knize Rona Chernowa *Alexander Hamilton*. Snaží se o to pomocí porovnávání textů muzikálu s Chernowovou knihou a případně dalšími prameny. V případě nesrovnalostí se tyto pak snaží odůvodnit pomocí těchto pramenů. Součástí práce je i poučení o Chernowovi a jím napsané biografii, stejně jako o muzikálovém žánru a jaké mohou být důvody změny historických událostí v díle. V konečném důsledku bylo zjištěno, že téměř všechny nesrovnalosti mají svůj důvod, ačkoli ne vždy je tento důvod na první pohled zřejmý, a také že počet popsaných událostí, které jsou historicky přesné, tyto nesrovnalosti neskonalé převyšuje.

## **KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA**

životopis, historie, Alexander Hamilton, muzikál, Lin-Manuel Miranda, Ron Chernow

## **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this thesis is to compare the events of Act One in the musical *Hamilton: An American Musical* to their model in Ron Chernow's book *Alexander Hamilton*. This is attempted through comparing the lyrics of the musical to Chernow's book and potentially other sources; in case of discrepancies there is an effort to rationalise them with these sources. The thesis also contains information about Chernow and the biography he wrote, as well as about musical theatre and the potential reasons for differences between the book and its adaptation. In the end it was found that nearly all inconsistencies have a reason, which may not always be apparent, and that the amount of historically sound information vastly outweighs such inconsistencies.

## **KEYWORDS**

biography, history, Alexander Hamilton, musical theatre, Lin-Manuel Miranda, Ron Chernow

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## Introduction

It is always better to take accounts that are allegedly “based on true events” with a grain of salt. There is generally a large amount of dramatization, whether for the audience to better enjoy it or to make real life stories better fit the narrative the writer wants to put forward. Some stories can deviate so far from reality that they become a complete work of fiction in their own right in everything but the name.

The same can be said of many an adaptation; in the past, multiple such adaptations have been bemoaned, reviled, or ignored by fan communities of the original medium. It is the case all over the world, with books, graphic novels, manga, poetry collections, and even films or television shows.

It does not seem to be the case of *Hamilton: An American Musical* – referred to henceforth simply as *Hamilton* – a hip-hop musical magnum opus created by Lin Manuel Miranda, a Puerto Rican – or Nuyorican, as he calls himself (Miranda and McCarter 277) – playwright, composer, lyricist, actor, and singer. It is Miranda’s second hugely successful musical, the first being the critically acclaimed *In the Heights* about the resident of the New York neighbourhood of Washington Heights. *Hamilton* was a major success with critics and audiences alike, accruing a record setting number of 16 Tony Awards nominations, 11 of which it won, and it sparked a new wave of interest in one of the American Founding Fathers and his real life.

That life was described in Ron Chernow’s book *Alexander Hamilton*, the original work that Miranda was adapting. The book itself was a bestseller when it first came out in 2004 and was awarded the first ever George Washington Prize. This book was what Miranda bought when he was going on vacation after his successful debut with *In the Heights* in 2008, and what he used as the basis for his magnum opus which debuted on Broadway in 2015. People clamoured for the musical and it saw massive success both on-stage and on-line as the Original Broadway cast album was released, gaining worldwide renown and popularity; but also, sometimes, criticism for its historical inaccuracies.

It is to be expected that a dramatic work will change historical realities for several reasons. Truth is, real life is not like a theatre play and therefore in recreating real events, one must



tackle multiple issues, if they want to change real life into a sung-through hip-hop musical about one of the Founding Fathers. There may be issues with pacing that need to be corrected. Some changes need to be made to lower the number of characters, or possibly to make certain characters more prominent, to allow them a full narrative arc rather than just having them come in and out randomly, like they might in real life. And to keep narrative tension, some events might need to be either added or omitted.

But it is the intent of this thesis to prove that by and large Miranda's *Hamilton* is a faithful adaptation to Chernow's *Alexander Hamilton*, and by extension a reasonably accurate portrayal of the life of Alexander Hamilton. That Ron Chernow worked as historical consultant on the show helped create a work that adheres to the necessary beats of musical theatre, while staying true to the source material whenever possible. There are of course undeniable historical inaccuracies in the musical, but those are expected to be kept on a rather minor scale. This thesis will attempt to prove that *Hamilton: An American Musical* accurately portrays the legacy of Alexander Hamilton as presented in Ron Chernow's book about the very man through an analysis of the first act. What is more, the author of this work also believes that there will be many allusions to historical fact that may be hinted at in the musical that are mentioned in the book and a careful reading of the lyrics might reveal them.

The principal materials used for this comparison will be Chernow's book *Alexander Hamilton*, Miranda's book *Hamilton: A Revolution*, various interviews with Chernow and Miranda, and other sources, if needed. The comparison of book and adaptation will be made nearly exclusively on the textual level; the musical utilises many modern approaches with music, dancing, style, and casting, but these are more difficult to compare as they either do not serve the story or are not meant to convey historicity. Rather they provide a connection to modern day United States of America and their variety nowadays.

The first part of the thesis will focus on Mr Chernow and his book. Then an overview of certain mores of musical theatre will be provided, followed by examples of issues encountered when adapting a biography into a musical. Finally, an analysis of the first act of *Hamilton* will be carried out, comparing and contrasting with textual evidence provided in *Alexander Hamilton*.

## 1 Ron Chernow

According to Hunter College President Jennifer J. Raab's introduction of Ron Chernow before his talk at her school, before the success of *Hamilton*, Chernow had not been "exactly what one would call a household name" (Roosevelt House Public Policy Institute at Hunter College 1:38-1:40). Be that as it may, by February 2016 when this talk took place, Ron Chernow had received for example a National Book Award for his first book, *The House of Morgan*, a George S. Eccles Prize for the best business book in 1993, and a Pulitzer Prize for his biography of George Washington, thus showing his capabilities as a historian and biographer. He was even named American Historian Laureate, an honorary title for the recipients of the American History Book Prize. Since then he has gained further acclaim, including the highest honour in his field as one of only three living biographers, the Gold Medal in Biography (PRH Speakers Bureau).

Chernow is an honours graduate of Yale and Cambridge and his first book is *The House of Morgan*, published in 1990 about the banking dynasty of Morgans. From then on, Chernow has published six other books – *The Warburgs* about another banking family; *The Death of the Banker*, a collection of essays about these powerful rich families; *Titan* about the life of John D. Rockefeller; *Alexander Hamilton*, the book that spawned the musical about the life of the first Treasury Secretary of the USA; *Washington: A Life* about the first American President; and finally, in 2017 *Grant*, about the American Civil War general and later President (PRH Speakers Bureau).

His many achievements in the business of writing books notwithstanding, the Broadway musical is what eventually catapulted him to stardom (Roosevelt House Public Policy Institute at Hunter College 1:58) and raised his profile beyond the usual circles of history enthusiasts. He worked on it as historical consultant and as part of its creative team received awards such as the Lucille Lortel Award for Outstanding Musical, a History Makers Award of the New-York Historical Society (PRH Speakers Bureau). The musical is a direct result of his efforts in capturing the life and time of Alexander Hamilton in the eponymous book in a balanced, fairly concise and engaging manner.

## 1.1 *Alexander Hamilton*

The biography of Alexander Hamilton was first conceived in a meeting with Chernow's agent after finishing *Titan*, where Chernow presented her with a list of possible subjects of his next biography and she suggested that he tackle the life of Alexander Hamilton (Roosevelt House Public Policy Institute at Hunter College 1:02:29). He had already written a series of books about financial moguls, and as such it would make sense that he should write about the life of the man who started the financial system that allowed these men to rise to prominence.

Chernow had been working on *Alexander Hamilton* since 1998 and it came out in 2004 to great acclaim, even being called by *The New York Times* "the best biography ever written about the man" (Brooks). The book made Chernow the first recipient of the George Washington Prize awarded to "the year's best works on the nation's founding era, especially those that have the potential to advance broad public understanding of American history" (Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History). It has since become one of the best-selling biographies of all time with over two million sold copies (PRH Speakers Bureau).

In the prologue to the book, Chernow mentions previous attempts made to capture the life of the extraordinary man who did more than any other Founding Father to bring about the USA that we know today (4). He mentions that the problem about Hamilton's biographies is that apart from the exhaustive seven-volume tribute to his father by John C. Hamilton (Chernow 2-3), created at his mother's behest, "earlier biographers had to rely on only a meagre portion of his voluminous output" (Chernow 5). Before *Alexander Hamilton*, papers were being rediscovered and added to the stacks of Hamilton's writings which now amount to twenty-two thousand pages (Chernow 5). Chernow himself uncovered during his research nearly fifty previously undiscovered essays penned by the man (6).

Hamilton himself kept very quiet about his private life and about his youth, especially his time in the West Indies; therefore, there are not many sources in his own writings to find out what it was like (Chernow 5). For that reason, Chernow also attempted to find "anecdotal material" (5) to further make the foremost proponent of the Constitution not only an intellectual, but also an emotional figure.

Aside from sources on the American continent, the research for this book included a search through records in “Scotland, England, Denmark, and eight Caribbean islands,” creating a well-rounded picture of Alexander Hamilton without pretension to knowing definitive answers to certain contentious issues such as Hamilton’s parentage or his skin colour (Chernow 734-735).

All this is to say that *Alexander Hamilton* is an authoritative account of Hamilton’s years and it can be considered an accurate retelling of the man’s life, inasmuch any biography published two hundred years after the death of its principal subject can be accurate. What is written in it will then be considered historical fact; if any event is referred to as such, it is with the caveat that the main source of the information is this very book unless stated otherwise. That assumption is strengthened by the extensive notes and bibliography provided in the book, producing sources on every sliver of information presented therein.

Structurally, the book is divided into 43 chapters, not including the Prologue and Epilogue which mainly feature Hamilton’s wife Elizabeth Schuyler Hamilton, or Eliza. It is ordered in a mostly chronological manner. In certain cases, a more thematic approach is taken in regard to specific chapters where Chernow comes back to events happening either simultaneously or even before the events of a previous chapter to not muddle the issue by strictly adhering to the chronology, while providing a more complete look at Hamilton’s life.

The story of Hamilton’s life from his early childhood in the West Indies up until his funeral and beyond is described in detail in the book. There are no attempts to hide the fact that in certain things we do not have the means to learn the full truth; but to offer a full view it presents the reader with possible explanations of certain events, or potentially with reasonings which may have led Hamilton to behave the way he did. Chernow presents all speculation with a grain of salt, making sure that the reader does not take it as solid fact but rather as questions which we may never learn the answers to. Examples of that would be the question of Hamilton’s father being either James Hamilton or Thomas Stevens (28; 735) and whether Alexander had fathered an illegitimate mulatto child (736). Chernow also warns that we should be careful not to apply 21<sup>st</sup> century sensibilities to late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century personalities. He even goes as far as to make sure that other historians’ assertions are critically examined, as was the case of James T. Flexner’s claim to Hamilton’s

homoerotic relationship with John Laurens (95) or Gore Vidal's supposition that Hamilton's "despicable opinion" of Burr was based on Burr's incestuous relationship with his daughter Theodosia (682).

After its publishing in 2004, *Alexander Hamilton* was optioned by film studios three times to make a feature film. None of these films have ever seen the light of day, opening the door for another avenue of adaptation; music. Lin-Manuel Miranda approached Ron Chernow in 2008 about wanting to make a concept album out of his book. It would be a hip-hop concept album called *The Hamilton Mixtape* which might one day be turned into a musical (Miranda and McCarty 214). After a few months, Miranda performed the first song of the future musical to Chernow (Roosevelt House Public Policy Institute at Hunter College 19:20-19:34), the very song he would perform in the White House on 12<sup>th</sup> May 2009 in front of the President of the United States and which would mark the first public performance of anything *Hamilton* (Miranda and McCarter 14).

## 2 Musical Theatre

It seems pertinent at this point to talk about the genre that Lin-Manuel Miranda adapted Chernow's *Alexander Hamilton* into. In his book *Musical Theatre: A History*, John Kenrick defines musical as "a stage, television, or film production utilizing popular style songs to either tell a story or to showcase the talents of writers and/or performers, with dialogue optional" (Kenrick 14). In this book he goes through the history of musical as an art form, paying special attention to Broadway, which in time became the main producer of famous musicals in the world – or perhaps rather the best-known one – beginning his analysis with the Ancient Greeks and finishing it in 2007, the year before the book was published.

He subsequently says that from a technical standpoint, musicals share certain key elements, which can be combined or in certain cases left out to create a more original work: music and lyrics; libretto; choreography; staging; and physical production (Kenrick 15). He shows the variability of the form throughout the book by mentioning productions which would leave out some of these elements to push the boundaries or to tell their story differently from most other plays. An example of this would be *Contact*, which dispensed of both lyrics and libretto and thus was more of a dance recital; that did not stop it winning a Tony Award for Best Musical (Kenrick 370). A more conventional one would be *Les Misérables*, which is to date one of the best-known musicals in the world and which also does not have a libretto and is instead sung-through.

He also suggests three key elements that each musical should have and likens them to the gifts from *The Wizard of Oz*: brains, or intelligence; heart, or emotional content and appeal; and courage to do something new (Kenrick 16). For all the technical elements that create a musical, Kenrick believes that all the best musicals – and that by no means should indicate musicals beloved by critics or ones that gained a slew of awards – share these three key characteristics. These characteristics in turn generate audience excitement, which allows the musical to survive.

Musicals can take inspiration from a variety of sources – they can either be built around pre-existing songs, such as *Mamma Mia* or *Jersey Boys*, so called jukebox musicals, or pop-sicals (Kenrick 373), or adapt stories from other media, for example *Phantom of the*

*Opera* or *Wicked*, based on novels; *Producers*, based on the eponymous Mel Brooks movie; or even the comic-book-based production of *Spider-Man: Turn Off the Dark*.

Today, it could be said that musicals are even more variable than written novels. That is not only because they can have a very similar amount of genre variability in the story, they have also a vast array of musical genres to pick from. It is for this reason that Lin-Manuel Miranda calls musical theatre “a mongrel form,” by which he means that musical theatre has appropriated certain genres such as jazz and rock (Miranda and McCarter 47). These are now as he says “just in the DNA” of musical theatre (Miranda and McCarter 196). This variability is even supported by a definition of musical by one of the greats of musical theatre, Oscar Hammerstein II:

It is nonsense to say what a musical should or should not be. It should be anything it wants to be, and if you don't like it you don't have to go to it. There is only one absolutely indispensable element that a musical must have. It must have music. And there is only one thing that it has to be—it has to be good. (qtd. in Kenrick 382)

Despite this variety, what musicals hadn't adopted yet according to Miranda, was hip-hop, which he wanted to legitimise on Broadway (Miranda and McCarter 196). Rebecca Mead's New Yorker article on *Hamilton* from the time of their Public Theater previews claimed that it is only the third significant attempt to bring hip-hop to the Broadway stage, after a short-lived attempt with the jukebox musical *Holler If Ya Hear Me*, and Miranda's own *In the Heights* (Mead). This suggests that Miranda's perceived mutability of the Broadway musical may not be as extensive as he would hope; meanwhile *Hamilton*'s success would suggest the contrary.

Either way, it is very difficult to say what musicals are or are not; it should suffice to say that musical theatre is made to tell a story, using music as a narrative device that drives the story forward in various ways. This view is then key for understanding the changes made in musicals about real-life events and the integration of the aforementioned technical elements to allow for better storytelling through music, be it motifs or the lyrics, and dance. It also helps towards understanding the reason why certain productions are able to not only awaken such strong emotions in their audiences but are also able to tell much more in a few seconds of music than other forms could on a full page of text.

## 2.1 Translating Biography into a Musical

Musicals about extraordinary people, even historical ones, are not a novel concept. According to *Hamilton* director Thomas Kail, four musicals about specific people are the “grandparents” of *Hamilton*. Those would be *Sweeney Todd*, *Jesus Christ Superstar*, *Evita* and *Gypsy* (Miranda and McCarter 214). Strong personalities attract creators who want to tell the stories they were a part of. But these stories, as stated earlier, often veer very far away from the original or from verifiable historical fact, which often does not follow the narrative beats of the adapting medium or is not interesting enough to build a narrative around. *Evita*, *Gypsy*, *1776* – another musical about the founding of America, this time centred on one of Hamilton’s later political foes, John Adams – or the very recent film musical *The Greatest Showman* about the life of P. T. Barnum are prime examples of such deviations.

It is difficult to explicate these deviations without direct quotes of the authors, but the causes of some may be reasonably assumed. Some such differences are excused by Ron Chernow saying in an interview that “history is long, messy and complicated; Broadway shows need to be short, coherent and very tightly constructed” (Roosevelt House Public Policy Institute at Hunter College 35:09-35:15). This quote exemplifies one of the biggest changes necessary for the translation between these different types of media: cutting. Events need to be cut to keep the narrative concise and clear to produce a play of sensible length to keep the audience enticed and not present too many narrative threads. Characters also need to be cut in order to achieve the cast of “at most maybe eight or ten [principal characters]” (Roosevelt House Public Policy Institute at Hunter College 35:23-35:27), as opposed to *Alexander Hamilton* which has hundreds of named characters.

These characters would come and go as their involvement with Hamilton waxed and waned, they would meet at various times and they would exit his story differently. In a musical, characters need to be set up early on and they need to be characterised in such a way that the audience can feel that their eventual character arc reaches a satisfying conclusion, thus allowing them to exit the story; or it ends early to leave the hero with motivation to right the wrongs the story did to these characters or to fulfil their goals as if they were the hero’s own. As such, characters that were already written into the play take over the roles of other people,



either merging them into an amalgam or simply substituting them to provide smooth pacing for a show.

Despite the need to cut characters and events, sometimes the opposite is needed as well. In one of his interviews, Chernow even says that “art has to go to places where eyes of biographer [*sic*] can’t” (Roosevelt House Public Policy Institute at Hunter College 1:00:39-1:00:43). Some scenes need to be added for various reasons, be it that the historical facts are missing, and that the audience should know what the character is thinking despite it being speculation, or to set up a character or an event in preparation for later scenes. An example of such an addition might be the “Schuyler Sisters” number, which was added later in the production on the behest of Kail, who liked the songs these sisters would have later in the first act – “Helpless” and “Satisfied,” both telling the story of Alexander Hamilton’s and Eliza Schuyler’s courtship and wedding from different perspectives – and wanted to find a way to introduce them sooner, and thus Miranda wrote this “New York anthem” (Miranda and McCarter 38). Other reasons to add scenes include creating an insight into a character, much like in “Wait for It” or to strengthen the audience’s connection to the characters such as in “The Story of Tonight.”

In a similar vein, where historical record is spotty at best, the playwright may opt for direct invention, such as with “Burn,” where Eliza Hamilton sings about erasing herself from the narrative by burning her letters to Hamilton in response to the Hamilton-Reynolds affair when we do not know when or why she destroyed her letters (2). One might also want to play up the uncertainty of certain events as is the case of “The Room Where It Happens,” where most of the information presented is served with a grain of salt by introducing it each time with “Thomas claims” (Miranda and McCarter 187), suggesting that the information’s only source is *Anas of Thomas Jefferson* (Chernow 328) and thus it is not to be readily believed because Jefferson would write down not only the content of discussions he was party to, but also gossip and sometimes outright falsehoods (Chernow 397).

From previous pages it is obvious that musical theatre has very few hard and fast rules to be adhered to, but rather several sets of unofficial ones. One such unofficial rule is the so-called “I Want” song. An “I Want” song is a number early on in the show where the protagonist proclaims what they want to achieve in life in such a way that indicates how this wish will

have a bearing on the plot (Miranda and McCarter 21). These songs are largely lyrical rather than epic and as such do not contain much factual information in themselves; instead they reveal the characters of the heroes. An “I Want” song then does not need to convey plot, thus effectively shortening the time available for it in the musical, while being next to indispensable for the audience’s understanding of the character in question.

## 2.2 Writing *Hamilton*

Chernow’s book spans 49 years of Hamilton’s lifetime filled with writings and events, which Miranda himself says could be made into three more musicals due to the multitudes of interesting moments in Hamilton’s life (ArchivesFoundation 8:18-8:23). Therefore, the need to condense and sometimes change certain events becomes instrumental in translating the behemoth of a book that is *Alexander Hamilton* into a theatre show that would hook paying audiences. As Miranda himself mentions, the first preview at the Public Theatre was more than three hours long and needed to be curtailed even then to be more palatable (Montclair Kimberley Academy 23:33-23:41). In the view of *Hamilton* director Thomas Kail, all the elements of the show needed to serve “The Story,” which “was not a list of events on a historical timeline [...] it was the emotional journey that Hamilton and the other key characters needed to make” (Miranda and McCarter 206-207), which included cutting and rewriting in case any of these elements was out of alignment with the rest of the show.

In changing *Alexander Hamilton* into *The Hamilton Mixtape* and ultimately into *Hamilton: An American Musical*, Lin-Manuel Miranda took the approach of writing about the events that personally interested him and then constructing connective tissue around these moments (Miranda and McCarter 173). Aside from that, McCarter confirms that the songs were written largely in chronological sequence (10), with very few songs ending up on the “trash heap” (222), comparatively to the length and breadth of the musical. The songs that did end up getting scrapped would sometimes be at least partially reincorporated into other songs, as is the case with “Congratulations” or “Valley Forge” (Miranda and McCarter 235, 222-223). Some would be rewritten to better work within the framework of the show itself, as was the case of the original lyrics to “Your Obedient Servant” (Miranda and McCarter 266).

This thesis especially concentrates on how the events and characters of *Hamilton*’s first act correspond to their historical counterparts on the textual level. However, one would be

remiss not to mention the musical side of the show, and specifically how it corresponds with the characters and story. *Hamilton* works with a plethora of genres, character themes and instrumental shorthand to elicit audience response that could not be got through the lyrics. One example could be that the song sung by British loyalist Samuel Seabury made use of a harpsichord, an old-timey instrument prophesying the ossified views that Seabury is about to sing about and setting up Hamilton's response (Miranda and McCarter 47). That is how the adaptation shows in music the difference between the calcified loyalism of the Tories and the intelligence and novelty of the young revolutionaries.

While *Hamilton* is usually being connected to hip-hop as if it was the sole genre utilised in the play, this could not be farther from the truth. Miranda's "mongrel art form" comment belies such classification, as do the various commentaries within his and McCarter's book about the songs. While hip-hop may be instrumental for *Hamilton* as the language of Hamilton himself and thus the language of the Revolution in the show (*PBS NewsHour* 4:26-4:35), the play also includes several tracks in the style of Rhythm & Blues, jazz, or even the so-called British Invasion, specifically the style of the Beatles (Miranda and McCarter 55). This variability and musical shorthand are utilised in virtually every stage musical or even background music in film, but mainly it is what allows *Hamilton* to present its narrative in a more concise way. That is necessary for a play of nearly 24,000 words, more than several Shakespeare plays (Miranda and McCarter 250). One analysis found that if it were sung in the style of a more "traditional Broadway show," it would have lasted four to six hours (*PBS NewsHour* 8:35-8:43), instead of its current two-and-a-half-hour runtime.

Lin-Manuel Miranda indicated on numerous occasions that Chernow's book was by far not the only source for the information. He travelled to various places connected to Alexander Hamilton to undertake research and write the musical there, namely Philadelphia; Hamilton's birth island of Nevis; St. Croix, where he grew up; and others (Miranda and McCarter 82, 137, 268). His sources also include Joanne B. Freeman's *Affairs of Honor*, Chernow's *Washington: A Life*, the letters Hamilton and his loved ones or enemies sent each other (Miranda and McCarter 99, 120, 169, 187), Hamilton's writings such as the *Federalist Papers* (Montclair Kimberley Academy 49:06) and others.

While some of the show's lyrics are lifted directly from the pages of history, if a bit polished to fit the style of the piece, such as passages in "One Last Time" (Miranda and McCarter 210), "The Reynolds Pamphlet" (Miranda and McCarter 234), or an early version of "Your Obedient Servant" (Miranda and McCarter 266), one must keep in mind that it is still a modern piece. However, to ensure historicity, Lin-Manuel Miranda made the effort of, on numerous occasions, checking and subsequently accepting or disregarding specific words in the musical based on whether they had been around by the era in which the musical takes place (Miranda and McCarter 163; @Lin\_Manuel) and according to Ron Chernow he "had forged an idiom that was a cross between standard 18<sup>th</sup> century speech and early 21<sup>st</sup> century slang" (Roosevelt House Public Policy Institute at Hunter College 20:55-21:03) which the characters speak.

There is one more important note to be made about the characters, specifically regarding their looks. As Lin-Manuel Miranda was reading Chernow's book and writing the musical, he "was never picturing the literal Founding Fathers" (Montclair Kimberley Academy 28:28-28:33). As opposed to other historical shows, such as *1776*, where the characters tend to be played by middle-aged or older Caucasian people, the cast of *Hamilton* comprises predominantly of young African-American and Latinx people. Those were the people Miranda and director Thomas Kail believed were best suited to perform the kind of music Miranda was writing for the show. This casting at first raised eyebrows even with people working on the show such as Ron Chernow, but ultimately, he himself became "a 'militant' defender" of the casting (Miranda and McCarter 33). This is to show that in such an all-encompassing artwork as musical theatre even casting can create a historical discrepancy to make a statement; it is what *Hamilton*'s creators mean when they say that it is a "story of America then told by America now" (Miranda and McCarter 33).

Proving that it is not simply a reworking of a historical narrative, the show is riddled with references to previous works of musical theatre, hip-hop albums, R&B songs, and even a podcast on which Miranda had appeared as a guest while writing *Hamilton* in the Public Theatre (McElroy et al. 00:56:45-00:57:02). As he said upon *Hamilton* sweeping the Tony Awards in 2016 and taking home 11 out of the record-setting 16 nominations, "This has everything I had inside me" (GoldDerby 4:34-4:37). *Hamilton* was written over the course

of six years all over the world and in the book co-written with Jeremy McCarter is repeatedly said to be the result of close collaboration between Lin-Manuel Miranda, Thomas Kail, Alex Lacamoire and Andy Blankenbuehler, which Miranda called his Cabinet (136), and many others. All these are responsible for the final product and its eventual historicity.

### **3 Analysis of *Hamilton* against *Alexander Hamilton***

The following part of this paper will be devoted to comparing the lyrics from the first act of *Hamilton* to its historical basis, particularly as presented in *Alexander Hamilton*. While it is expected that the timelines of Hamilton's actual life and the musical made in his name will not completely match, the working hypothesis is that despite some dramatic license, the final version of the musical does not stray too far from historical truth. In cases where the musical is different, there will be an effort to explain these contradictions. This should help facilitate the final verdict whether the changes serve a purpose or came from a disregard to historical fact.

The analysis will be performed on all Act One songs in the order of their appearance in the musical by commenting on their historical validity. Monologues and dialogues will be treated as made up in detail but for any pieces of information supplied in them an attempt will still be made to verify them against *Alexander Hamilton* or potentially other sources. Due to the lyrical density of the show, the analysis will be limited to Act One of the musical as extending it to Act Two would make this work far too long and might not actually provide a more representative sample. Each act is a self-contained part of Hamilton's character arc; whereas in Act One his star is rising and he is surrounded by friends, Act Two sees his gradual descent into political obscurity and tragedy as he is beset by his enemies. It is the author's full intention to eventually analyse Act Two as well in a future work. Nonetheless, for the purpose of determining the overall level of historicity within the story, concentrating on the first act should suffice as the changes made are ubiquitous and generally equivalent in both acts.

Unless stated otherwise, any and all extracts of the lyrics or background information about the musical on the following pages quoted with only page number are taken from Lin-Manuel Miranda's and Jeremy McCarter's *Hamilton: The Revolution*.

#### **3.1 "Alexander Hamilton"**

In "Alexander Hamilton" we are met with the prodigious youth in a song for which Miranda "[took] the first 40 pages of the book, accurately condensed it [*sic*] into a four-and-a-half minute song," according to Chernow (Roosevelt House Public Policy Institute at Hunter

College 20:25-20:31). These forty pages correspond to the first two chapters in which Chernow describes Hamilton's birth and/or upbringing in poverty "in the middle of a forgotten / Spot in the Caribbean" (Chernow 16). This "spot" could mean either Nevis, where Hamilton claimed he was born (Chernow 7), or St. Croix, where he spent a large part of his childhood.

In the very first stanza, Hamilton is alluded to as "bastard, orphan, son of a whore and a / Scotsman" (16). These epithets are what his enemies would use to denigrate him with varying degrees of truthfulness attached to them (Chernow 12). It is true that Hamilton was, in the eyes of the law, a bastard; his mother, Rachel Faucette, had married a man whom she later left, leading to her legal inability to get married after their eventual divorce (Chernow 11-12), thus rendering Alexander and his older brother James illegitimate. If one disregards Chernow's speculations about Thomas Stevens (27-28), as he himself does most of the book, then it is generally accepted that Hamilton's father was James Hamilton, who came from a landed Scottish family. Although plagued with misfortunes throughout his life and eventually dying alone in the Caribbean, he was important enough to Hamilton that he sent him money and kept correspondence till James' death in 1799 (Chernow 12, 580).

James Hamilton being alive until Alexander was 44 would of course mean that the latter was not an orphan in the traditional sense. As the musical says, however, "When he was ten his father split" (16), leaving Alexander, and his brother – who is not mentioned in the musical – fend for themselves with their mother (Chernow 21-22). This is what makes Alexander the "Founding Father without a father" (16) even if he kept in sparse contact with James. Two years later his mother died of an unspecified illness that she and her youngers son contracted when Alexander was twelve, making the brothers functionally orphaned (Chernow 24) when "Alex got better but his mother went quick" (16).

After this, the song establishes that young Hamilton "Moved in with a cousin, the cousin committed suicide" (16), an allusion to Peter Lytton who killed himself when Alexander was fourteen. What the musical does not mention is that Lytton's father James would come into Hamilton's life briefly to claim his son's estate but would die within a month, with neither father nor son making any provisions for the young Hamiltons (Chernow 26) and thus leaving him "with nothin' but ruined pride."

Hamilton, 14, would then start work for the mercantile house of Beekman and Cruger, which had supplied his mother with provisions. There he was learning what he could about trading, markets, and the economic principles that governed imperial countries (Chernow 27, 29-30). And thus, in the musical he is “workin’—clerkin’ for his late mother’s landlord, / Tradin’ sugar cane and rum and all the things he can’t afford” (17).

Apart from his tumultuous family life, the early stanzas of the song make note of one of the most important events in young Hamilton’s life: the hurricane that ravaged his home in the West Indies and helped raise him from obscurity, when people “Took up a collection just to send him to the mainland” (16). The hurricane is what put the real Hamilton on the map thanks to Hugh Knox who read Hamilton’s letter and published it with his permission. This, just like in the musical, led to an outpouring of support and a subscription fund to get the young prodigy to North America (Chernow 36-37).

This song also serves the purpose of setting up the hero and several of his important traits: his superior intellect, his drive, his immigrant status, his fierce abolitionism and his foresight. These are mentioned regularly in *Alexander Hamilton* and as such, it is difficult to point to specific representative instances. The one thing that is not supported in the book is Hamilton’s readiness to steal from the third stanza (16); in fact, much of the book is dedicated to proving allegations of money-grabbing raised against Hamilton false, as that was how much of his life was spent as well.

### **3.2 “Aaron Burr, Sir”**

The second number is by Miranda’s own admission a “fictional first meeting between Hamilton and Burr” (23). According to Chernow, their first meeting may have happened in Elizabethtown as Hamilton was studying preparatory courses before being admitted to college (43).

Rather than trying for a historically accurate meeting, Miranda dramatically sets Burr up as Hamilton’s foil through his mantra “Talk less. [...] Smile more” (24). Hamilton is clearly surprised at this and he cannot follow this advice even until the end of the song. That is when he calls Burr out with a paraphrase of a quote often misattributed to Hamilton: “If you stand



for nothing Burr, what'll you fall for?" (25), setting the tone for the two men's interactions: one brash and excitable, the other patient and quiet.

Opposite this misattributed quote, there is a nearly direct quote from history when Hamilton says: "God, I wish there was a war! / Then we could prove that we're worth more than anyone bargained for ..." This wish is a reference to Hamilton's earliest surviving letter that he penned to Edward Stevens, in which he wrote, "I wish there was a war" (qtd. in Chernow 30-31). While the recipient may be different, it is still indicative of Hamilton's aspirations and his character. Similarly, he did want to graduate in two years like Burr did but was ultimately rejected (Chernow 47-48).

Further straying from history, in one of the lines Hamilton claims to have punched a bursar at Princeton College. The fact is that there are no references to that not only in Chernow's book, but anywhere else. Chernow himself says he asked Miranda about this because he did not find any reference to it (ArchivesFoundation 22:43-22:47). The reason for that is prosaic; it never happened, and Miranda wanted this word in the show simply for the similarity between "bursar" and "Burr, sir." The joke stayed in the musical, as Miranda attempted to use as many rhymes to "Burr, sir" as he conceivably could (23).

Probably the most blatant deviation from historical fact is how three of Hamilton's friends are introduced here: John Laurens, marquis de Lafayette, and Hercules Mulligan. This meeting is especially fictional as there is no indication in Chernow's book that Mulligan ever met the other two. In fact, Mulligan may well have been Hamilton's first new friend on the continent (Chernow 41-42), whereas Laurens and Lafayette only became his friends in 1777 after he had joined the army (Chernow 94-95). This historical discrepancy was defended by Miranda to Chernow by explaining that "he needed a quartet of characters [...] that the audience could follow through Act One" and it would have to be these four men (33).

Not only is it a fictitious story of first meetings, but it is also decidedly wrongly dated. The opening lines of the song identify the time and place as "Seventeen seventy-six. New York City" (23). That would be at least three or four years after Hamilton would have set sail for the continent, probably in late 1772, mere months after the hurricane (Chernow 38). The change may be attributed to the desire for the much more famous year to set the scene – in February 1776, Hamilton joined the continental military (Chernow 72), which would not

make a compelling first meeting between him and Burr and would close the avenue for his cerebral exploits before joining the army.

### **3.3 “My Shot”**

This number is not packed with historical information as it is a further introduction of Hamilton’s friends from the previous song, continuing right where it left off. What is more, it is Hamilton’s “I Want” song (21), the largely lyrical number in which the protagonist establishes their goals and desires. In Hamilton’s case it is “not throwing away his shot,” meaning taking his chances to achieve a better station in life and the emancipation of the colonies from Britain through the imminent revolution, or a glorious death in attempting to attain these goals.

Probably the most interesting incongruity is Hamilton’s singing about being “only nineteen” (26), even though he would have been twenty-one according to Chernow, who claims 1755 for Hamilton’s birth year. That is contradicted by Hamilton himself, who professed he was born in 1757, making him two years younger (Chernow 16-17). Thus, it can be explained by Hamilton wanting to appear younger in-fiction just as he had in real life and as a clever hidden reference on Miranda’s part.

Besides that, Hamilton mentions a scholarship to King’s College. While Chernow calls Hamilton a “charity student” due to his St. Croix subsidy, no mention of a monetary scholarship is found anywhere in the book. He did study at King’s and continued his studies even while in the military, particularly the studies of finance (Chernow 48, 155).

The song also further fleshes out Hamilton’s friends. Mulligan, born in 1740 (Chernow 41), is the oldest one by far, signified by “I got y’all knuckleheads in loco parentis” and simply wants a better life than that of a tailor (27); it is not mentioned in Chernow whether he was successful. Lafayette wants to bring about a country without a monarchy and eventually help quell unrests in France (27); the marquis was ultimately branded as a traitor and imprisoned (Chernow 433). Laurens wants the leadership of the first black battalion (27) and as will be seen later, both the musical and Chernow’s book agree that he died before that became true. Meanwhile Burr redoubles his efforts in silencing the other men and delivers the warning that “If you talk, you’re gonna get shot!” (27) and so foreshadowing his and Hamilton’s duel.

What is missing from this song is Hamilton's restraint during his studies at King's College. Despite being far from a British loyalist, Hamilton was against physical attacks on avowed Tories. This is indicated by the anecdotes in Chernow where he talked down an enraged mob for long enough to allow the escape of King's College's president Myles Cooper (64) or the printer James Rivington (69). These instances show that young Hamilton would not immediately spring into the revolution, as described in the show, but took a more gradual approach to this. Such a development would of course have to take much more time than the musical could devote to it and as such it appears reasonable to omit from the show.

### **3.4 “The Story of Tonight”**

The two following songs are both more dramatic license than historical fact. They present the audience with a look at the thus far introduced main male characters, sans Burr, and female characters with Burr added, respectively. Apart from the issue with Laurens, Lafayette, and Mulligan probably never meeting like this, they do not supply much information to be historically accurate, or inaccurate, as it were.

“The Story of Tonight” is simply a song that the previously established quartet of friends sings of a better tomorrow. Based on a melody Miranda wrote in his childhood it “did everything I wanted this scene to do: It conveyed a yearning and innocence I felt in finding a group of friends to sing with me” (35). It also serves to somewhat wind the show down after the energetic “My Shot” and before transferring into “The Schuyler Sisters.”

### **3.5 “The Schuyler Sisters”**

“The Schuyler Sisters” is a number added to the show later in its development at the behest of director Thomas Kail and is what Miranda calls “a New York anthem” (38). It introduces the audience to Hamilton's eventual wife Elizabeth Schuyler, and two of her sisters, Angelica and Peggy. It also establishes Philip Schuyler as a wealthy man wishing to go to war (43); in reality in 1775 Schuyler had been on the Second Continental Congress and in the Continental Army (Chernow 65-66).

The sisters' personalities are established here, particularly Angelica's, who is painted as the smartest and most outspoken, mentioning her own thoughts on the Declaration of Independence and having read Thomas Paine's *Common Sense*, thus showing her intellectual

prowess. Her intelligence is further exemplified by her use of the aforementioned musical “language of the Revolution,” as she is the only woman who raps on the show and is allowed to express an acute interest in politics.

The sisters do not make a proper appearance in Chernow’s book until “The Lovesick Colonel,” the chapter in which Hamilton and Eliza get engaged and married. Yet this song is relatively in keeping with the personalities of the sisters as Chernow presents them. They will be properly discussed in the sections “Helpless” and “Satisfied.”

### **3.6 “Farmer Refuted”**

Despite this song essentially working mostly as a set-up for King George III’s solo and a show of Hamilton’s “fiery brilliance” according to Miranda (47), it is the most historically accurate one since the opening number. While the conflict is more theatrical than it would have been in reality, it exemplifies Hamilton’s ability to bring down opponents with his words, or by using their own words against them.

While the lyrics to the song are not lifted exactly from the annals of history, the basic events are described in Chernow: Samuel Seabury, a Loyalist Reverend, published a series of pamphlets under the guise of “A Westchester Farmer” (57-58). These were subsequently repudiated by Hamilton – writing under a pseudonym, as was the norm then – in “A Full Vindication of the Measures of the Congress,” wherein he particularly reviewed the Boston Tea Party and the British response to that (59), thus lending credence to the lyrics:

Chaos and bloodshed already haunt

Us, honestly you shouldn’t even

Talk and what about Boston?

Lok at the

Cost, ‘n all that we’ve lost (49)

In these Hamilton uses Seabury’s lyrics and weaves his own words into the existing text while managing to support the opposite opinion.

The name of the song itself is a direct reference to Hamilton’s subsequent writings. After “A Full Vindication” was published, Seabury responded to Hamilton’s essay. Hamilton, not

willing to let Seabury have the last word, published an eighty-page essay in response, called “The Farmer Refuted” in which he attacked Seabury as well as his arguments (Chernow 59-60).

The song ends with the ensemble announcing “A message from the King” and the appearance of King George III, the British sovereign at the time, and his appearance (49), leading directly into the next number.

### **3.7 “You’ll Be Back”**

Written in the “Beatlesque” style of British Invasion (55), this song is in essence Britain declaring war on the American colonies through the character of George III. It is the first of his three songs and serves very little purpose besides comedy relief, as George is never treated seriously in the musical.

The song itself is very loosely based on the real King George issuing a royal proclamation on 23 August 1775 (Chernow 67) to bring the colonists back under Britain’s control. In the song he threatens that “Oceans rise” (57) thus alluding to “the largest amphibious assault of the eighteenth century” (Chernow 76). At the end of the song, the stage direction indicates that redcoats kill a rebel (57), thus starting the Revolutionary War in earnest.

### **3.8 “Right Hand Man”**

Coming from the death of the rebel soldier, “Right Hand Man” is the first number directly dealing with the Revolutionary War and the one in which George Washington is introduced. It is also somewhat disjointed where timelines are concerned, encompassing two chapters of Chernow’s book but jumping from one place to another.

The opening lines inform the audience that the British have 32,000 troops in New York harbour (60), which Chernow says were on 3,000 ships, a force commanded for the express purpose of intimidating the Americans in July 1776 (Chernow 76).

The bleak outlook of colonial troops being “outgunned, / Outmanned, / Outnumbered, outplanned” is described by Washington, which he follows by one of the rare raps that Washington delivers, as he drops the veneer of a leader and a statesman (60-61). This corresponds to Chernow’s description of Washington as a man not openly showing emotion

and keeping himself deliberately aloof except for moments when his temper uncontrollably flared up (Chernow 88).

Some of Washington's tactical decisions, particularly to divide his forces and retreat inland are mentioned as the British invade New York (61); all those retreats happened, with Brooklyn having been taken in August 1776, Kip's Bay lost in September of the same year, leading to a retreat to Harlem (Chernow 79-80). Incidentally, as Kip's Bay was being overrun by redcoats, Washington's composure cracked, and he reportedly cried: "Are these the men with whom I am to defend America?" (Chernow 80) as he was faced with his troops' chaotic panicked retreat. This quote was used nearly verbatim in *Hamilton*, only switching the relative pronoun "whom" for "which" (61).

As Washington's desperation rises, there is a brief interlude with Hamilton and Mulligan as they decide to "rob [the British] of their advantages" and steal the cannons from the Battery (61). This incident, however, predates the British actual invasion by almost a year, as it happened on the same night as King George's proclamation, 23 August 1775. Hamilton and fifteen other volunteers dragged over ten out of the two dozen cannons posted at the Battery to ensure they would not fall into enemy hands (Chernow 67).

The second half of the number comprises of two conversations: first Washington and Burr and then the former with Hamilton. Burr attempts to get into Washington's good graces and offer strategy suggestions instead of just "fleeing west" (63). Despite his praising the General's strategy of "firing on the British from a distance" (62), a strategy utilised by the Americans much to British chagrin (Chernow 66), he is ultimately sent away. Instead Washington prefers to see Hamilton to whom he describes their unenviable situation and appeals to him to become his right hand man, which Hamilton accepts (64).

Burr was in fact on Washington's staff in April 1776, before Howe's invasion of New York. Burr accepted the General's offer after returning from Quebec, as mentioned in the song. Ultimately, he quit this posting soon after though, as he realised that he was being relegated to a position he felt superior to, instead of being consulted in matters of strategy as he hoped to be (Chernow 74). This makes the meeting of Hamilton and Burr in Washington's tent highly unlikely but works toward building up Burr's eventual resentment of Hamilton.

Hamilton did visit Washington's tent months later; his company came under the General's command after their retreat to Harlem and apparently, he did impress Washington with his skills (Chernow 81). Washington was not the only one who was impressed (64), as multiple people had noticed Hamilton, but it was Washington who managed to fill an empty spot on his staff with the prodigious talent in early 1777 (Chernow 85).

At the end, the song establishes the Hamilton-Washington relationship (64). Hamilton anticipates the General's needs and becomes someone who writes Washington's letters and organises his information, slipping into a rapport with him that led to them being an unbeatable team (Chernow 88).

### **3.9 “A Winter's Ball”**

The following song gives the audience the first indication of time since “Aaron Burr, Sir” and announces that the play has entered the year 1780 (70). Going by Chernow's book, 1780 was when Washington and his troops were encamped in Morristown for the winter, which was indeed filled with balls at which young Hamilton would be present (Chernow 127-128).

The other part of the song relates young Hamilton's libido, a trait he shared with Burr, or as the song says, they are both “reliable with the / ALL MEN: Ladies!” (70). While in Morristown, Hamilton would engage in flirtations and small infatuations (Chernow 93, 128), also exemplified by the probably fictional anecdote about Martha Washington's feral cat being named after him (Miranda and McCarter 70). Of Burr at this general time, Chernow says that one of his characteristics was an “insatiable chasing after women” (Chernow 74).

In his opening, Burr mentions Hamilton's growing star due to his being Washington's aide-de-camp, which is what allowed him to socialise equally with people he ordinarily would not have access to. One of these would be Eliza Schuyler, who arrived in Morristown with a military escort to be with relatives (Chernow 128). She did not, however, arrive with her sisters as the song's lyrics would suggest (70). That marks another instance of shuffling characters together for a more compelling narrative, as showcased and explained in the following two sections.

### 3.10 “Helpless”

The events of “Helpless” and “Satisfied” occur concurrently, with the main difference being the focal character. “Helpless” recounts Hamilton’s courtship from Eliza’s view, talking about her immediate enchantment with the young soldier. This does not agree with Chernow’s historical timeline, where Hamilton and Schuyler met in Albany more than two years prior (Chernow 102-103). For dramatic tension, however, Miranda has Angelica meet Hamilton first, during “A Winter’s Ball” (81), thus explaining her arrival with Eliza.

Eliza’s personality gets showcased here: “I have never been the type to try and grab the spotlight” (71) is an accurate description according to Chernow, for she did “everything in her power to focus the spotlight exclusively on her husband” (Chernow 130). Angelica’s depiction here is also fairly accurate, as is her affection for Hamilton. As Eliza sings about “Laughin’ at my sister as she’s dazzling the room” (71), she describes Angelica’s effect on everyone which is in turn described in Chernow thusly: “Angelica never met a famous, intelligent man she didn’t enchant” (Chernow 204).

Miranda quite accurately portrays the length of Alexander and Eliza’s courtship – they did agree to wed barely a month after meeting in Morristown (Chernow 129). As Chernow says, Eliza was the only Schuyler daughter who didn’t elope (129). She and Hamilton went through the protocol of obtaining her parents’ express permission, which was received through a “businesslike [*sic*] letter” from her father, Philip Schuyler (136), assuring good relationships with the Schuyler family.

Before the wedding Eliza reports Angelica saying: “I’m just sayin’, if you really loved me, you would share him” (72). In this Miranda echoes the text of Angelica’s letter to Eliza from 1794, fourteen years after Hamilton and Schuyler’s courtship: “if you were as generous as the old Romans, you would lend him to me for a little while” (qtd. in Chernow 467). He also sets up the “emotional and intellectual affair” he and Renée Elise Goldsberry would play on-stage as Alexander and Angelica, respectively (167). Hamilton and Angelica’s love for each other has been the focus of much speculation, by the cast and creators of *Hamilton* (164, 167), and by historians and Hamilton’s contemporaries alike (Chernow 282, 522, 536).

Finally, Hamilton’s solo towards the end of the song where he is “anti-bragging” about not having “a dollar to my name / An acre of land, a troop to command, a dollop of fame” (76)



is his warning to Eliza that he may not be able to provide for her financially. This was true of the original Hamilton as well, when he wrote Eliza letters about being poor and that their “future rank in life is a perfect lottery” (qtd. in Chernow 146). He was further making sure about her wish to marry him in a letter asking her: “Do you soberly relish the pleasure of being a poor man’s wife?” (qtd. in Chernow 146), which is quoted nearly verbatim in a later song, “That Would Be Enough” (110), despite the letter being written before they were married.

### **3.11 “Satisfied”**

Switching the point of view to Angelica, this song renders a fictional view of Hamilton’s and the older Schuyler’s first meeting and thus providing an explanation of her mention in “A Winter’s Ball.” It works to set up the two characters’ infatuation with each other that according to Chernow would last a lifetime (Chernow 133). This song offers several points of contention with Chernow’s book, however, particularly Angelica’s status as the unmarried eldest child obligated to a “social climb” (83). Miranda admits that Schuyler had many sons, a fact which he forgot (83) – there were, in fact, three that Hamilton would ingratiate himself with (Chernow 129). Not only that, in 1777, long before the Morristown encampment, Angelica had eloped with John Barker Church and would therefore not be able to carry out any courtship with Hamilton, were she even there (Chernow 134).

In the number Angelica accurately assesses Alexander as a penniless soldier with great dreams. She is, however, aware both of her sister’s affection for the man and of everything barring her from pursuing that self-same affection herself. She also accounts for the fact that as a Schuyler sister, she is above him in station and such a marriage between the eldest daughter and a random soldier would reflect strangely on her family (82). While no account of Angelica’s stripping Hamilton’s pretences is in the book, it is not difficult to assume somebody could harbour such reservations in the 1780s, even though the man was eventually beloved by the Schuyler family (Chernow 133-134).

It is then for dramatic purposes that Angelica is shown as having to cede Hamilton to her younger sister. This sets up their ongoing emotional connection, as well as Angelica’s devotion to her sister, which carries through the events of Act Two as well. The Schuylers’ numbers exemplify the dramatic shorthand needed to make the show more concise and

coherent; and while it comes at the cost of relinquishing some historical accuracy, by and large it is representative of the three core relationships between the three protagonists. More than that, Miranda claims in an annotation on *Genius.com*: “‘Helpless’ and ‘Satisfied’ are a microcosm for the whole story which entirely depends on who tells it,” and thus exemplify the basic premise for the show.

### **3.12 “The Story of Tonight (Reprise)”**

This song marks yet another fictional meeting of Hamilton’s friends, as none of the characters were present at Hamilton’s and Schuyler’s wedding (Chernow 148). Hamilton’s friends’ jokes, particularly about his not being poor anymore and their eventual chances of getting married too (86) – although at least Laurens and Lafayette had already been married (Chernow 95, 96) – is present to lighten the atmosphere before the following numbers with no real pretence of historical accuracy.

Burr is also present, to contrast once again with Hamilton who betrays his ambition by saying “I wish I had your command instead of manning George’s journal” (86). This disappointment over his posting would run through Hamilton’s military career from early on, despite it might be what eventually caused Hamilton’s political ascent (Chernow 86). This song then begins to set up the next one; to do that, Miranda has Hamilton find out that Burr is in love with the wife of a British officer but not doing anything to get her; a fact that according to Miranda was “a way into Burr” (87) and showcasing another difference between the two men at Hamilton’s wedding.

### **3.13 “Wait for It”**

Burr’s first big solo is an ode to restraint, something that the real-life Burr practised extensively (Chernow 192). He begins by belying his perceived inactivity in pursuing Theodosia, the British officer’s woman (91). The real Burr did marry her eventually in July 1782 (Chernow 169). Chernow makes no mention of how long Burr and Theodosia Prevost were in contact, and therefore it is difficult to gauge the veracity of Burr’s claim that she writes him letters daily (91).

He then recalls his family and their deaths – most of Burr’s family died before he was three years old (Chernow 191). He also explains the core difference between himself and Hamilton:

Hamilton doesn’t hesitate.

He exhibits no restraint.

He takes and he takes and he takes

And he keeps winning anyway.

He changes the game.

He plays and he raises the stakes (92)

This is the core, fundamental difference between them; where one is chasing after his desires, the other is willing to “wait for it,” not showing his hand of cards. Chernow’s description of Burr is in keeping with this: he calls Burr “a man of ingrained secrecy” who “spoke to one person at a time and then in confidence” and “evaded clear-cut positions on most issues and was a genius at studied ambiguity” (Chernow 192). Such descriptions make it clear that Burr, while not openly Hamilton’s ideological opposite, had from Hamilton, as Miranda says, “a fundamental difference in temperament” (87). The song therefore serves as a window to Burr’s soul that the audience could never receive from any amount of dialogue or even from Hamilton’s point of view.

### **3.14 “Stay Alive”**

Per the stage directions, the onset of the song finds Hamilton seated and writing letters. He explains that these are Washington’s as he has “taken over writing all his correspondence” (96). Hamilton did indeed write for Washington, with the latter’s knowledge and sometimes even without it, to the point that of the field orders he sent out, most survive in Hamilton’s handwriting (Chernow 86, 89). Hamilton is thus introduced as the core element of Washington’s staff, but he is uncomfortable with that assignment; he yearns to earn his due in command, the one thing that Washington will not grant him (97-98), much like his historical counterpart who did not give Hamilton in a command assignment for over four years (Chernow 159).

The unenviable predicament of the Continental Army is touched upon, particularly how underequipped it was. “Local merchants [...] only take British money” (96) is to a point historical fact. Due to Americans not having enough funds to back it up, the paper money issued by Congress kept losing its value and the merchants were more willing to sell to the redcoats (Chernow 108). However bad the situation got, though, there is no indication in Chernow that the Continental Army “resorted to eating our horses” (96).

Beside the squalid conditions the army found itself, “Stay Alive” develops the core concept that allowed the Continental Army victory over their British overlords: not meeting them in a field of battle but rather winning in a war of attrition (Chernow 83). To win, the Americans need to “Provoke outrage, outright. / [...] Don’t engage, strike by night. / Remain relentless ‘til their troops take flight” (97). This strategy ultimately did lead to American victory – for the Americans victory meant Britain leaving them alone; for Brits victory meant Americans’ total defeat. This unlevel playing field was what the historical Hamilton wanted to exploit: “By stopping the progress of their conquests and reducing them to an unmeaning and disgraceful defensive, we destroy the national expectation of success from which the ministry draws their resources” (qtd. in Chernow 156) and thus echoes Washington’s words in the play.

Furthermore, Hamilton’s friends make another appearance to be sent off where they would need to be in the play: Lafayette goes to request French aid, Mulligan goes back to New York, while Laurens and Hamilton write essays against slavery (97). This is all to a point present in the book but for the essays; in fact, it was a proposal asking the creation of several black battalions (Chernow 121). Mulligan was indeed in New York (Chernow 185). Lafayette’s hope seems a bit anachronistic at this point – France had already entered the war on the patriots’ side, or rather on the side opposing Britain before 1780, the last clearly stated date in the musical but Lafayette did endeavour to bring French aid to the colonists (Chernow 119).

Finally, this number introduces the first note of dissent toward Washington, in the character of Charles Lee, his criticisms of Washington and his less than courageous leadership during the Battle of Monmouth. The battle itself is outlined well: the heat, the confusion of retreating and attacking again, the “stalemate” and Lee’s overall paltry performance; even

Lee's defensiveness and insistence that this was somehow the fault of Washington is touched upon (Miranda and McCarter 98). Chernow describes the battle in similar terms. He says the temperature was in the high nineties and that Lee's erratic behaviour confused Washington (Chernow 114). He also reports that "most observers termed it a draw (Chernow 115).

While there may have been more important aspects of the Revolutionary War, this one is notable because it leads to the duel of John Laurens and Charles Lee in response to his insults against Washington. While Lee did by his own admission also treat Hamilton extremely rudely, the challenge came from Laurens (Chernow 116). There is no indication in Chernow that this was because Hamilton was forbidden by Washington to duel Lee himself.

Interestingly, due to the two events listed in the song, it is clear that were the musical ordered chronologically, it would fit elsewhere. It would have to come right after "Right Hand Man." As the Battle of Monmouth occurred on 28 June 1778 (Chernow 114) and Laurens' duel with Lee on 23 December 1778 (Chernow 117), this would place the lead-up to it almost two full years before Hamilton's wedding on 14 December 1780 (Chernow 148). Instead, it is placed here, where it forms a sequence eventually leading to Hamilton's falling out with Washington and his forced army leave.

### **3.15 "Ten Duel Commandments"**

In "Ten Duel Commandments" the audience receives a crash course in 18<sup>th</sup> century duelling. Despite there being a number of duels in Chernow's book, no hard and fast rules are given. There may be references here and there, such as the multiple references to the various "commandments" interspersed throughout the book, but he supplies no exact orders to be followed. Instead, Chernow refers to the so-called "code duello" (690). This was a set of rules for duelling originating from Ireland, but followed largely in Europe and America, sometimes with "glaring deviations" ("Code Duello: The Rules of Duelling."). It was such a large part of the era's psyche that Miranda has the whole company explain these rules (99).

Rather than Chernow, Miranda claims Joanne B. Freeman's *Affairs of Honor* as the principal source of information on duelling (99). Freeman's book, despite focusing deeply on Hamilton and his eventual duel with Burr, particularly in chapter four, does not appear to set

these rules out quite as clearly either, though one could glean where Miranda got them from (Freeman 162-196).

The reason for establishing these clear rules at this point is for keeping dramatic tension later. Miranda and Kail needed to explain duelling rules in the first act, so that the audience could readily understand them in Act Two when the two pivotal mortal duels – Philip and Alexander Hamilton’s – occur (95). It would eliminate the need to explain them at the emotional apex of the second act. The template for the song came from a song called “Ten Crack Commandments” which according to Miranda is “a how-to guide for illegal activity in the 90s,” contrasting it with his own “how-to guide to illegal activities in the 1790s” (“Ten Duel Commandments Lyrics - Original Broadway Cast of Hamilton”). The song is then here both to help the flow of future events and as an homage to the hip-hop genre.

Unlike in the show, Burr was not Lee’s second. That dubious honour fell to Major Evan Edwards (Chernow 117). But introducing Edwards would mean bringing in a new one-off character right after Lee, who would not appear again himself. Besides, Burr was on Lee’s side during the controversy around Monmouth, as he was also against praising Washington (Chernow 115). It therefore makes sense both dramatically and historically to have Burr and Hamilton meet on the field of honour, while agreeing that “duels are dumb and immature” (100). It is unclear from Chernow’s book whether this was a sentiment the real-life Burr shared; he did later manage to avert a duel between Hamilton and James Monroe in 1797 (Chernow 541) but also duelled Hamilton’s brother-in-law (Chernow 590) before duelling Hamilton himself, not supplying an easy answer to young Burr’s sensibilities.

### **3.16 “Meet Me Inside”**

Directly following the events of “Ten Duel Commandments,” Lee is shot in the side and proclaimed by Burr to be yielding (104). In fact, Lee requested a second round of fire. Due to Lee praising Washington before it could have been taken, Laurens declared satisfaction and they left the duelling ground without that (Chernow 117). There is no direct consequence mentioned for any of the men for the duel, especially from Washington.

In the show, however, audience is finally getting an explanation of why the events of the two previous numbers have been temporally displaced until after Alexander and Eliza’s wedding;

it is to provide Washington one more excuse to send Hamilton home because his wife needs him alive (105). As Washington enters, he shouts at the assembled duellists, “What is the meaning of this?” (104), an actual quote of Washington’s reserved for Lee during the infamous Battle of Monmouth (Chernow 114). What follows is an argument between Hamilton and Washington, which is largely fictional, but ends in a historical result: Hamilton left Washington’s staff dismayed at the General’s behaviour in 1781 (Chernow 152). What is missing is Washington’s plea for Hamilton to come back (Chernow 152); on the contrary, dramatic Washington reiterates his order to “Go home” (105).

Hidden within this song is also a reference to the two men’s working relationship. Hamilton would ask for a command to “fly above my station after the war” (104), only to be repeatedly shut down by Washington who at that point may have needed him more where he was than commanding troops (Chernow 150). In this song, Washington acts more like a disappointed father than a commander, to the point of calling Hamilton “son” multiple times to Hamilton’s chagrin (104-105). This fatherly instinct is insinuated in Chernow – Washington called Hamilton “my boy” (Chernow 87) and favoured him over other aides, even though Hamilton never quite managed to relax around the General, always calling him “Your Excellency” (Chernow 88). According to Hamilton himself, this was due to his feeling no friendship towards the General (qtd. in Chernow 152).

Thomas Conway, another member of the Continental Army discontented with Washington, is mentioned in passing in the song. Along with him, there is a sly reference to his own duel fought due to his deriding the General. When Hamilton says “John should have shot him in the mouth. / That would have shut him up” (104), it directly references Conway’s duel with General John Cadwalader. In that Cadwalader did shoot Conway in such a way that the bullet entered through his mouth and to which he quipped about stopping Conway’s lying tongue (Chernow 106).

### **3.17 “That Would Be Enough”**

Here the concept of the narrative is introduced through Eliza, asking to “be a part of the narrative / In the story they will write someday” (110). The narrative is one of the main themes in the musical, despite not making an overt appearance in the book, or at least not in such a capacity. While the book is concerned about historical narrative and Chernow is often

acutely aware of his sources of information, there is not a direct mention of Hamilton or Eliza being too aware of the future generations' stories. If anything, Hamilton was more preoccupied with his present reputation than with judgment from the future.

Once again, real life did not provide a direct parallel for this conversation. As Hamilton left Washington on his own accord and had not learned about Eliza's pregnancy until after he received a command of a battalion in July 1781 (Chernow 159), this conversation could not have happened the way it is described here. Not only that, while Hamilton did leave Washington's staff of his own accord due to his discontent over Washington's behaviour and his temper, he never intended to completely leave the army (Chernow 151-153). He kept demanding a leadership position from the General to the point of sending him an indirect threat of resignation before receiving the coveted command (Chernow 154-155, 158-159).

### **3.18 "Guns and Ships"**

After a glowing introduction by Burr, calling him "An immigrant you know and love who's unafraid to step in" and "America's favorite fighting Frenchman" (118), Lafayette takes centre stage. Burr's praise is wholly deserved according to Chernow, who says that many people "warmed to Lafayette" and even Benjamin Franklin and George Washington felt a profound kinship with the young patriot (96). Lafayette informs the audience that he brought French reinforcements under the command of comte de Rochambeau, the titular guns and ships. This is a feat which the real Lafayette accomplished in July 1780, nearly half a year before Hamilton's wedding (Chernow 139), but this triumph allows the Lafayette in the show to exclaim that they can end the war in Yorktown – which the real Lafayette did as well (Chernow 160). But this can only be accomplished if Washington brings back Hamilton, which he eventually does (Miranda and McCarter 118-119).

Lafayette's big number was conceived by Miranda as a sort of a joke about the Frenchman's development since his short rap in "My Shot," to show how being in command helped him not only with his language skills but his military abilities as well (118). Lafayette is "speed-rapping" through the song, first about being a military hero, then about the need of getting Hamilton back into the fold, with Washington in agreement (118-119) in one of the fastest songs ever performed on Broadway, clocking at 19 words in three seconds (Libresco).



The praises Lafayette heaps on Hamilton are fully justified in Chernow's book:

Sir, he knows what to do in a trench.

Ingenuitive and fluent in French, [...]

No one has more resilience,

Or matches my practical tactical brilliance. (118)

Hamilton was indeed noted as a master of infantry drills, gunnery, pyrotechnics and other aspects of the military life, including trenches (Chernow 63, 162). He was also fluent in French, his abilities surpassing those of men who lived in France for years, like Jefferson or Franklin, due to his French Huguenot mother's tutelage (Chernow 17). Hamilton's ingenuity is difficult to pinpoint, but it shines through all his meticulous studying and planning, as does his resilience and tactical brilliance.

### **3.19 "History Has Its Eyes on You"**

Here Miranda provides a short reprieve before the upcoming climactic battle. In this song Washington emphasises to Hamilton the necessity of restraint. He reiterates that no matter what you do in life, you are not the one telling your story, a hard lesson that he had learned as a young man. This brings into the play two key motifs: the title of the song, the warning that what they do will be written down in history, no matter the result; and the fact that one cannot control "who lives, who dies, who tells your story." The latter motif is, according to Miranda the key to the whole musical (120). This is then the *raison d'être* for the song, to introduce these core concepts.

While Washington's early beginnings are briefly mentioned in *Alexander Hamilton* (87), this book is not the source of the information about Washington leading his soldiers into a slaughter in his youth. Rather it is Chernow's book on Washington which supplied this anecdote; one which Miranda says was instrumental to him in understanding Washington (120). It is what in Miranda's eyes led to Washington's seriousness and his restrained behaviour and created the venerated aura of leadership around him which he wants to convey here.

### 3.20 “Yorktown (The World Turned Upside Down)”

The third and final song of Act One that plants the show directly into a specific year, “Yorktown” tells tale of the decisive victory of the Revolutionary War that finally allowed Hamilton to earn battlefield glory and marked his retirement from the Continental Army. The Battle of Yorktown, in reality and in the musical, is set in 1781. It was a battle won thanks to troops led by the West Indian immigrant and an allied Frenchman, taking British redoubts which allowed the Americans to finish their trenches and use their artillery at the besieged Brits in the city (Chernow 165-166). While the Frenchman in question was not Lafayette, it is the marquis who in the musical refers to this in one of the most popular lines of the musical, “Immigrants: / HAMILTON, LAFAYETTE. We get the job done” (121).

It would be difficult to enumerate all the things that Miranda manages to cram into the four-minute number about Hamilton’s final revolutionary battle. There are mentions of Chesapeake Bay, where Lafayette is waiting (121) – in reality it was the comte de Grasse, a French admiral (Chernow 160). Miranda also recounts the anecdote about Hamilton ordering his men to take their bullets out of their guns for a night ambush and that their codeword was Rochambeau (Miranda and McCarter 121; Chernow 163-164). Even Hamilton’s conviction that he would have a son is seen in the lyrics – it is unclear if that was accidental on Miranda’s part, who of course knew Hamilton would have a son, but Hamilton himself did implore his wife to bear him a son rather than a daughter as penance for not writing him often enough (Miranda and McCarter 121; Chernow 163). The battle did last roughly a week and was ended by “a red-coated drummer boy [who] appeared on the parapet” (Chernow 164). After the battle, the British sang “an old English ballad” called “The World Turned Upside Down” (Chernow 165); Miranda used that story but opted against using the song’s melody as it did not fit the mood he wanted to set and he wrote his own (122).

All of Hamilton’s friends reappear, most notably of course Lafayette with whom Hamilton converses in the beginning. Laurens, on the other hand, is mentioned to be in South Carolina (122), despite the real John Laurens not only having been at Yorktown, but under direct command of Hamilton as they took one of the redoubts (Chernow 163). This was a decision fuelled by the need to have Laurens back in South Carolina by “Tomorrow There’ll Be More of Us” as there was not enough time to explain Laurens’ exploits (122). Finally, the show’s

version of Hercules Mulligan makes his triumphant reappearance as a spy, exclaiming his adherence to the Sons of Liberty (122); meanwhile his real counterpart, though probably one of “Liberty Boys” long before the war, would stay in British-occupied New York until the end of the war roughly two years later, smuggling information and being exonerated by Washington during the latter’s stay in New York (Chernow 42, 185).

In the middle of the song, Miranda hides a short yet important conversation:

LAURENS. Black and white soldiers wonder alike if this really means freedom.

WASHINGTON. Not yet.

On the surface, this can simply mean that in spite of this battle being a decisive victory for the Americans, it was not the end of the fighting. Miranda himself writes in an annotation to this song on *Genius.com* that it is significant that Laurens is the one asking: “This Lauren’s [sic] line is especially important; he died after this battle, but before the war technically ended because the British did not completely withdraw from the south.” In the book, however, Miranda mentions another point of view in an annotation to the second line: “Washington, of course, owned hundreds of slaves, and did not emancipate them until his death at the end of the century” (122). By having a man who died while fighting to free America, and who was for a time Hamilton’s closest partner in the goal of ending slavery, ask whether freedom had been achieved; and by having it answered by the future first President of the United States who owned hundreds of slaves himself, Miranda subtly sheds light on the paradoxical nature of the American colonists’ fight for their emancipation, all the while they were barring others from doing the same, a paradox that appeared to irk the real Hamilton as well.

### 3.21 “What Comes Next?”

One would be hard-pressed to find a direct equivalent to this number in Chernow’s book. Certainly, there are mentions about fighting with France and Spain (Chernow 118). The reality of the British not being able and willing to pay for the war effort has also been mentioned in “Stay Alive.” But after Yorktown, the war still was not won; it raged for several months afterwards. That is because this song, rather than to provide history, exists for dramaturgical reasons.

While “Yorktown” is a rousing song ending on a high and hopeful note, it would not fit the necessary niche of the final song in the act. Kail is quoted as saying: “You have to end an act with a dramatic question [...] Ending a war is not a question. What you do *with* that is the question” (124). He and Miranda also agreed that there was only one character who could possibly entice the audience to stay in their seats: King George (124). This creates a poignant moment where the King asks, in the most mocking way possible, “What comes next?” (127) leaving the audience to ponder this question after the curtain falls in a few minutes’ time, a question that the American characters will have to find an answer to, creating new conflicts.

### **3.22 “Dear Theodosia”**

Another short, more or less ahistorical interlude is in order before whirling back into action; this time its main purpose is to highlight the similarity between Burr and Hamilton at the height of their lives. The song is named for Burr’s daughter Theodosia, born at roughly the same time as Philip Hamilton after their fathers’ army days were over (Chernow 165, 170). Hamilton and Burr duet about their hopes for both the children and the “young nation” that their parents will make right for them. They note their worries about fatherhood as each of them sings, “My father wasn’t around” (129), a fact already previously apparent from the fact that Hamilton’s father left when Alexander was ten, as noted in “Alexander Hamilton,” and Burr’s died when he was barely eighteen months old (Chernow 191).

The purpose of the number may be to further bring calm into the show, an eye of the storm between the rousing “Yorktown” and supremely hectic “Non-Stop,” a calm not quite provided by George III. The song is also Miranda’s way of having Hamilton and Burr admit personal flaws and predict that they’ll “make a million mistakes” (124-125) as they become the fathers both of new children, and the very nation they serve. This intrigued Chernow, who appreciated Miranda’s “refusal to deify the founders—one reason he calls the show ‘American history for grown-ups’” (Miranda and McCarter 125) because they are not just the glorious figures of history books but rather more grounded real people.

### **3.23 “Tomorrow There’ll Be More of Us”**

The calm lingering after the previous duet is disturbed by Eliza as she brings Hamilton a letter. Hamilton is certain that it is from John Laurens and he wants to read it later. Upon

learning it is from Laurens' father he asks Eliza to read it to him immediately. From the letter he learns that John died in South Carolina, still trying to recruit an all-black battalion. After a moment of silence, Hamilton throws himself into his work (131).

This is the one section of the musical that makes no appearance on the cast album. Miranda says that it was not there due to it being a scene, not a song and wanted it to be a surprise, presumably for the theatregoing audience (@Lin\_Manuel). Ultimately, it also became a surprise available to those reading *Hamilton: A Revolution* as well (130-131).

There is no historical record of a letter from Henry Laurens to Alexander Hamilton when Laurens died in Chernow's book (172). Searching for letters that Laurens Sr. sent Hamilton on Founders Online, a website dedicated to "Correspondence and other writings of six major shapers of the United States," only yields three such letters, none of which informs Hamilton of the younger Laurens' death (Founders Online). It is not inconceivable though to assume that a letter informing Hamilton of his dearest friend's death would be sent. It is not certain whether by his father or by someone else but that is largely inconsequential, especially for the musical.

What is certain, is that Laurens died in 1782 in a skirmish at the end of the war, making him "one of the last casualties of the American Revolution" (Chernow 172). Hamilton was crushed by the death of his closest friend and ideological ally. Chernow says that Laurens' death meant for Hamilton that from then on, his only confidantes were Eliza and Angelica and he never created such a close male friendship in his life. Of this Chernow says: "He became ever more voluble in his public life but somehow less introspective and revelatory in private" (Chernow 173). The placement of the song right before the bustling finale of Act One is also somewhat in keeping with Chernow's book; after mentioning Laurens' death, he describes Hamilton starting work on the Confederation Congress (Chernow 173).

### **3.24 "Non-Stop"**

After more than an hour of music, *Hamilton's* first act comes to a final crescendo, reprising themes and lines of nearly every preceding song to see the culmination of Hamilton's efforts and ambition as he ascends into the role of the first Treasury Secretary. The song opens on Burr singing about finishing their studies and practising law after the war, with Hamilton

creating a partial echo (137). They actually finished their studies while the war was still going on, and thanks to Burr they benefited from being veterans (Chernow 168). The aforementioned echo might be a sly reference the fact that Burr and Hamilton did indeed set up their law practices within six months of each other (Chernow 169), a fact mentioned by Burr in the show: “Even though we started at the very same time, / Alexander Hamilton began to climb” (137). Chernow ascribes this climb to Hamilton’s heroic deeds at Yorktown and his long-time proximity to Washington (Chernow 169).

Miranda then provides a glimpse into Hamilton and Burr’s courtroom lives in showing them defending Levi Weeks in the “first murder trial of our brand-new nation” (137). To that, Miranda says in an annotation: “This trial didn’t occur until way later, but it’s such a perfect way to introduce their postwar [*sic*] lives—two lawyers, fundamentally different, meeting up in court—that I moved it up” (137). Levi Weeks’ trial happened in early 1800, nearly eighteen years after the war. Burr and Hamilton did defend him together with Brockholst Livingston and while there is a transcript of the trial, the clerk did not record the names of defence attorneys as they spoke (Chernow 603-604). Due to that, it is difficult to measure the veracity of Burr’s chastisement of Hamilton: “Our client Levi Weeks is innocent. Call your first witness. / That’s all you had to say” (137). It is not inconceivable though, for Chernow himself says in *Alexander Hamilton*: “In speech no less than in writing, Hamilton’s fluency frequently shaded into excess” (190).

Hamilton then raps a stanza about corruption, particularly in Albany. He also boasts about his calling to public service and his mastery of law (137). It is ironic that Hamilton, so often accused of corruption himself, would bring it to the forefront like this. Yet it is in keeping with Chernow’s varied descriptions of the man. The reason for this line may be Miranda’s wonder at the existence of the Albany Museum of Political Corruption (137).

Hamilton is then whisked off to the Constitutional Convention as a New York junior delegate and he dazzles the convention with his oratory skills and his novel ideas (138). Historically, his road was a bit thornier; the political climate in New York was not particularly partial to the idea of overhauling the previous constitutional system under the Articles of Confederation, nor were they expecting the Convention to truly change them. Hamilton’s plan to send five delegates to the Convention was cut to three and in May 1787 he was sent

there with two political opponents. That meant that come any vote, Hamilton would be in a minority as the only New York delegate wishing for a strong union (Chernow 227).

Of Hamilton's time at the Convention, Burr says this in the musical:

Goes and proposes his own form of government!

His own plan for a new form of government!

Talks for six hours! The convention is listless! (138)

This is wholly true; Chernow even mentions that there was no break for lunch (231). After two moderate plans were put forward to the floor, after three weeks of debating Hamilton stood in front of the assembled delegates and delivered the six-hour speech in which he suggested a completely new system of government, which

would have the continuity of a monarchy combined with the liberties of a republic, guarding against both anarchy and tyranny. He now suggested a president and Senate that would be elected but would then serve for life on "good behavior." Hamilton's chief executive differed from a hereditary monarch because he would be elected and, if he misbehaved, subject to recall. (Chernow 232)

This speech, however misguided, may have ultimately led to the larger acceptance of Madison's plan for a national government, which after Hamilton's performance gained traction (Chernow 235).

After the Convention, there follows a conversation between Hamilton and Burr that is by Miranda's own admission fictional in which Hamilton says to Burr, "you're a better lawyer than me" (138). While not from Hamilton's pen, this assessment is somewhat based on history. Chernow claims that Hamilton's opinion of Burr as a lawyer was slightly ambiguous, appreciating the latter's resourcefulness but not seeing much substance (193). The Hamilton in the show does not shy away from praising Burr though, and for one reason: he wants Burr to join him in defending the US Constitution (Miranda and McCarter 138, 142), in what would eventually become *The Federalist Papers*.

That was an endeavour conceived and overseen by Hamilton, projected to defend the new Constitution and help people better understand it. In this effort he was joined by John Jay

and James Madison, asking two more allies who ultimately did not write any of the essays (Chernow 247). It is for dramatic reasons that Miranda chooses to have Hamilton ask Burr to join in as well. In his own words:

It's plausible as Burr travelled in the same circles and held similar views to Hamilton, but it gets at the root of their fundamental difference: Burr is not willing to expose himself or his legacy for something this risky. (138)

Before Burr describes Hamilton's efforts with the *Federalist* further, Angelica intercedes with a brief interlude. She tells Hamilton that she is leaving for London for she has "found a wealthy husband who will keep [her] in comfort for all [her] days" (142). Her slight derision of her husband is surprising, given the fact that the real Angelica eloped with him; but she did say that he did not possess Alexander's eloquence (Chernow 281). This stanza actually manages to combine three points on Angelica's timeline. Firstly, if the song is assumed to be organised chronologically, it would be the year 1787, after the Constitutional Convention and before the *Federalist* project. This is in contradiction with Angelica finding a husband, a feat accomplished years before even meeting Hamilton (Chernow 134). And finally, while Angelica did leave for Europe after the war, it was in 1783 (Chernow 200), years before the Convention. For Miranda, this historical confusion serves to move Angelica across the sea (142) and it puts Angelica to London where she is supposed to be and thus serves to fix previous inaccuracies.

Angelica leaves Alexander behind with Eliza, who tries to console her husband asking if her spending time with him would be enough (143). This is somewhat ironic because in "Dear Theodosia" Hamilton promises to be around (129); however, much like the historical Hamilton, who professed that he "[lost] all taste for the pursuits of ambition" and wanted to only be with Eliza and Philip (qtd. in Chernow 167), he throws himself into work.

Afterwards, Burr recounts the tale of *The Federalist Papers* in speech because Miranda admits that "the facts are so extraordinary that no amount of spin on the ball can make them land any harder" (143). Burr says:

Alexander joins forces with James Madison and John Jay to write a series of essays defending the new United States Constitution, entitled The Federalist Papers.



The plan was to write a total of 25 essays, the work divided evenly among the three men. In the end, they wrote 85 essays, in the span of six months. John Jay got sick after writing 5. James Madison wrote 29. Hamilton wrote the other 51. (143)

This is completely supported in Chernow (248), who drives the point of Hamilton's and Madison's achievement even further by disclosing the speed at which the essays were being churned out: one essay roughly every three days, with little revision or mutual communication (Chernow 249).

Finally, Washington makes an appearance as he approaches Hamilton. He tells his old aide-de-camp that he is trying to get the best people he can for his new government, because the people are asking him to lead. In fact, one of the people asking him to lead, in no uncertain terms, was Alexander Hamilton himself (Chernow 270-271). As the show's Washington is trying to convince Hamilton to help him, Hamilton impatiently asks if he should head the Treasury or State Department (143). This conversation is not quite historically accurate, for two reasons: Hamilton was never in consideration for the State department; furthermore, he was not even the first choice for Treasury. Instead, Washington first asked Robert Morris, who recommended Hamilton (Chernow 286-287). The omission of Morris is self-explanatory: with as many characters as there are, there should be little desire to introduce an extremely minor character who would never be seen again. Hamilton's hope to head the State Department is left unexplained but could either be a show of his ambition, or a very sly reference to the fact that Jefferson later often felt that Hamilton is encroaching on his territory (Chernow 289).

Interspersed between these short scenes, there are lines of chorus proclaiming Hamilton as being "non-stop" and several variations on the question why he keeps writing like he's running out of time (137-138, 142-145). In theory, going by the events depicted in it, the song spans over six years of Hamilton's life between 1782 and 1789. Apart from the flurry of activity above, examples of Hamilton's exploits in these years include: chairing a military committee; setting up a private bank; creating a Board of Regents and serving on it; and actively championing the abolition of slavery through the New York Manumission Society (Chernow 180, 200, 206, 214-216). If it can be said of anyone that they are non-stop,

Hamilton at the end of Act One and in the 1780s alike, is that person; a person who did not throw away their shot.

### **3.25 A Quick Aside About Act Two**

The second act follows much of the same changes as the first act does. The most prominent are changes in the timeline, a few changes or conflation of events and one very specific change in characters.

Characters are changed in “We Know,” a number in which Jefferson, Madison and Burr come to confront Hamilton about his connection to James Reynolds. They accuse him of financial speculation and are instead met with explanation and description of Hamilton’s affair (229-231). In reality, the men who confronted Hamilton were James Monroe, Abraham B. Venable and Frederick Muhlenberg (Chernow 416). This scene is specifically defended by Chernow himself saying they were three Jeffersonians and that he understands that Miranda needed to work with already established characters (Roosevelt House Public Policy Institute at Hunter College 35:58-36:28).

An example of timeline jumping may be putting this scene after John Adams’ ascent to the presidency, therefore rooting it in 1797 at the very least. This can also be explained by the dramatic need for coherency, as this number leads into “Hurricane,” where Hamilton decides to write the Reynolds Pamphlet (232-233), which in turn introduces “The Reynolds Pamphlet” itself, the whole sequence capped by “Burn,” Eliza’s heart-breaking solo about her reaction, or lack thereof, to her husband’s infidelity. This sequence then narratively strengthens the story by having Hamilton confronted at this part of the story rather than when it would really occur, in December 1792 (Chernow 416), barely six months after the affair itself ended.

Events are also compressed to assure the smooth run of the musical – namely for example “The Election of 1800” is the show’s implicit reason why Burr finally decides to put an end to Hamilton’s meddling in his affairs, as Hamilton supports Jefferson against Burr (259-260). The reality was slightly different: Hamilton’s endorsement of Jefferson in the 1800 election was more secret than an open disavowal (Chernow 632). Instead the difference was overtly an insinuation of a “despicable opinion” which Hamilton was supposed to have

held of Burr (Chernow 681), after Hamilton openly supported Burr's – and his own – political rival in the race to the New York gubernatorial position in 1804 (Chernow 674).

These are but few examples of the kinds of changes made in the second act, to illustrate that in its differences from the source material, it differs very little from the first act. The only difference is in the character arc; where Hamilton's star rises in Act One, it slowly declines throughout Act Two only to shine in the final numbers where he decides to stick to his ideals and rather throw away his shot than to tarnish his legacy in a duel. While the second act would, and hopefully will, also provide an enticing subject of analysis, in conjunction with the first act it would be well outside the projected and desired scope of a bachelor thesis.

## Conclusion

This work set out to assess the truthfulness of *Hamilton: An American Musical* in comparison to Ron Chernow's *Alexander Hamilton*. This assessment was performed by comparing the information presented in the first act of the musical to that in the book, where applicable. If not applicable, there were attempts to find other sources mentioned as source material for the musical as well as sources for historical background and interviews with the creators. In case of discrepancies, explanations were offered from interviews with Miranda and Chernow and Miranda's book about the creation about the musical, or by considering the difference between the original and adapting medium.

The limitation to the first act was chosen since Act One, with its 23 songs and one scene, provides a representative sample of the whole play. While both acts are fundamentally different in the focus and scope regarding Hamilton's life, each can be separately viewed as representative of Hamilton's personality and part of his life journey. The characters that appear in both acts, while fundamentally the same, deal with vastly different problems. For Hamilton, Act One is mainly focused on the Revolutionary War and starting a life and a career, surrounded by friends; Act Two is about starting a nation while trying to keep a career, beset by enemies.

By default, there is a lot missing from the musical as opposed to the book. Therefore, the approach was rather to assess whether the events and persons mentioned really are those with matching historical record in *Alexander Hamilton*. This has proven to be largely true as all people mentioned in Act One are also people mentioned in *Alexander Hamilton*; although the inverse is not strictly true, as some people are omitted for dramatic reasons; e.g. the second of Charles Lee in "Ten Duel Commandments." Some changes were also made to the timelines of several characters, explained as dramatic license due to the need of having characters where they need to be in the next scene, such as John Laurens in "Yorktown."

In spite of all this, it is the author's belief that all major changes are sufficiently explained. Either through Miranda's book, or through conjecture led by the knowledge of musical theatre, one can surmise why most of the changes were made. Most of what could in another play be called "mistakes" are conscious, deliberate decisions, largely defensible through the stated means. Chernow's proclaimed love of the musical in all the interviews used here as a

source also belies the prejudice that the historical inaccuracies are too rampant in the show. The core of the show is the eventual telling of stories and histories and leaving behind a legacy; and through the reference point of *Alexander Hamilton*, it is safe to say that *Hamilton* is a valid representation of history.

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